# Language and Identities in Bilingual Narratives <br> A case study of a Japanese－English Bilingual 

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#### Abstract

This study explores how a balanced Japanese－English bicultural bilingual，Eri，makes sense of the common bilingual experience of＂feeling different＂when switching languages．Specifically，it examines how she performs and experiences identities in first－person narratives and how she understands the link between her identities and her two languages．Data from the narrative elicitation reveal that Eri used two different sets of discursive strategies in English and Japanese to help her tell the＇same＇story． In the interview，she reported to＂feel different＂when speaking in her two languages and attributed the differences to various sources，including cultural，emotional and linguistic differences．The results from this study demonstrate how bilinguals can relate to the same events quite differently in their two languages and that this experience of feeling different is not only experienced internally but also observable externally．


本研究は，Eri という均衡日英バイリンガルを対象にし，バイリンガルは 2 つの文化•言語の中で自分のアイデンティティーをどう理解するのかを明らにすることを目的とする ナラティブ分析では，Eri 本人の個人的な経験について英語と日本語で語らせ，インタ ビューでは，2つの言語それぞれを話している時の感覚や，言語を変える際の意識や見解などについて調査した。結果として同じ出来事について語っているにもかかわらず，英語と日本語のナラティブは互いの単なる直訳ではなく，インタビューでは言語を変え る時「自分が違う人のように感じる」と報告した。

## Introduction

Feeling different when switching languages is an oft－reported experience among bi－and multilinguals，a phenomenon particularly well documented in the works of bilingual writers， reflecting on the difficulty they experienced when attempting to translate their own work （Pavlenko，2006）．It is also not uncommon in everyday life to hear bi－and multilinguals mention behaving differently in their two languages，or even claiming to possess different personalities in each language（Grosjean，1982）．In the first half of the $20^{\text {th }}$ century，this sense of feeling different was assumed to be pathologic and was often associated with mental confusion and identity crises （Baker \＆Jones，1998），conflicting allegiances and contradicting roles（Pavlenko，2006），and even in some extreme cases，schizophrenia（Adler，1977）．

More recently，contrary to what had been feared，results from Dewaele and Pavlenko＇s （2001－2003）Bilingualism and Emotions Questionnaire（BEQ）suggest that having dual／multiple selves is a common experience among bi－and multilinguals．The large－scale online questionnaire， administered to over 1000 bi－and multilinguals around the world，revealed that almost two thirds of the respondents felt＂like a different person＂when using different languages．Research on the experience of complex identities has gone on to span multiple disciplines and a range of methods，from conventional self－reports（Dewaele，2013；Dewaele \＆Nakano，2012）to personality inventories（Ramirez－Esparza，Gosling，Benet－Martínez，Potter，\＆Pennebaker，2006； Veltkamp，Recio，Jacobs，\＆Conrad，2012），narrative analysis（Koven，2007；Panayiotou，2004），as well as experimental Skin Conductance Response tests（Harris，Aycicegi，\＆Gleason，2003）and recall tasks（Marian \＆Kaushanskaya，2004；Schrauf，2000）．

Recent studies of bilingual identities have focused on the negotiated identities of immigrants among native speakers．In the case of Japanese－English bilingual kikokushijos／returnees，research has examined their readjustment and assimilation into Japanese society upon returning from abroad（e．g．，Pang，2000；Sueda，2014）．While very few studies have delved beyond the initial reentry phase to their country of origin（Kanno，2003），this study
investigates a Japanese-English bicultural ${ }^{1}$ bilingual $^{2}$ that returned to Japan several years prior to the study. With a slightly different perspective and focus, this paper aims to help broaden the discussion on Japanese-English bilingual identities and contribute an empirical understanding of this common experience of "feeling different" among bi- and multilinguals. Although it is not uncommon for identity studies to use narrative data as a window into a bilingual's understanding of his/her identities, very few have examined actual language use and speech, which Koven (2007) argues is the precise medium through which individuals display their identities. This study looks at discourse data and combines both quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyze both the bilingual's subjective understanding and objective performance of identities.

## Literature review

## Identity as Multiple and Social

In common discourse, identity has been defined as "the everyday word for people's sense of who they are," which Ivanic (1998) criticizes as "misleadingly singular" (p.11). This ubiquitous yet complex term has been researched extensively in a variety of disciplines. Despite terminology and theoretical stances varying from one discipline to the other, there is now an emerging general consensus in the fields of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology that identity is not something stable, permanent or unitary (Block, 2007). Many researchers have shifted away from the essentialist view, which postulates that identity is biologically and/or environmentally determined and that groups are essentially homogenous (Bucholtz, 2003), to what Block (2007) calls a "broadly poststructuralist" approach (p. 27). This study draws on the social-constructionist and poststructuralist conception of identity as multiple, fluid and discursively constructed, and adopts an "inclusive view" to identity that involves "both the 'inner" and 'outer' self, the self and others, and the individual and the social" (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, \& Brown, 2013, p. 18).

Joseph (2004) argues that multiple identities can be understood in at least two ways: internal roles and external perceptions. Examples of internal roles are given such as "child, friend, spouse, parent, teacher, colleague, boss and so on" (p. 8). External perceptions are built on the notion that identity is not privileged to the individual alone and that others also create multiple perceived versions of the self.

## Identity and language use

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985) research on Creole found that language was used to manifest complex sets of belongings, rather than only one single variationist identity (Labov, 1972). In addition to global identity categories such as ethnic identity, social identity and gender identity, identities can also be locally constructed and deconstructed during interaction, which in the case of bilinguals may appear in various forms, such as code-switching (Gumperz, 1982), pronominal choice (Friedrich, 1972) and pronunciation (Beebe, 1977). Studies that have adopted the micro-sociological approaches of conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis to show that multiethnic Japanese-English bilinguals utilize code-switching as a resource to index multilingual identity as well as multicultural identity and multiethnic identity (Greer, 2003, 2008, 2012; Tada, 2014). Unlike monolinguals, who only have one language to deploy, bilinguals can draw from two sets of linguistic resources and often a more diverse sociocultural framework when conceptualizing, constructing, and performing complex identities in interaction. They may choose to emphasize or understate different aspects of their multiple identities at varying stages of a conversation depending on a number of factors, including the aim, interlocutor, context and experiences.

## Language and Thought

The concept of linguistic relativity (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) posits that different languages lead individuals to perceive and experience the world differently (Sapir, 1929). Like the traditional Whorfian approach, Neo-Whorfian studies also investigate how language influences an individual's perception of the world. However, they do not claim that language determines thought but rather that it influences aspects of thought to varying degrees. Arguably one of the most influential Neo-Whorfian proposals is Slobin's (1996) "thinking for speaking", which postulates that language influences thought when a speaker engages in the act of speaking. The

[^0]"thought" described here is somewhat different to "thought" in the original Whorfian hypothesis in the way that it concerns the "special kind of thinking ... that is carried out, on-line, in the process of speaking" (p.74). Since there is only "a limited set of options for the grammatical encoding of characteristics of objects and events" (Slobin, 1987, p. 435), when a speaker formulates an utterance, he/she has to organize his/her thoughts according to the available linguistic forms of the language. A child thus builds a particular way of thinking that is required for speaking when acquiring a language.

## Language and emotions

In the research area of emotions and affect, findings have generally supported the idea that biand multilinguals experience greater emotionality in the L1 compared to the L2. Dewaele (2013) examined self-reported language choice for swearing among bi- and multilinguals and reported that the emotional force of swear words and taboo words decreased with the order in which languages were learned. Schrauf (2000) observed that childhood and adolescence memories that were experienced in the L1 were typically more detailed, vivid and emotionally marked when recalled in the same language. On the other hand, by measuring Skin Conductance Responses (SCR), Harris, Gleason and Aycicegi (2003) found that some of their Turkish-English late bilingual participants responded more strongly to stimuli in the L2 compared with the L1, and therefore argued that the age and order of acquisition do not necessarily always predict the emotionality of the language. Instead, they propose that "language is experienced as emotional when it is acquired and used in an emotional context" (p.277), regardless of age.

## Feeling Different in Two Languages

In the 1960s, Ervin-Tripp (1964; 1968) conducted a pioneering series of studies using various verbal tasks on bilinguals and found that respondents provided very different answers depending on the language of elicitation. For instance, in a sentence-completion task administered to a group of Japanese-English bilingual women living in the United States, one woman responded to the prompt "When my wishes conflict with my family..." with "It is a time of great unhappiness" in Japanese, but "I do what I want" in English (Ervin-Tripp, 1968). Following the same line of inquiry, several studies have used different variations of Ervin-Tripp's method to investigate the commonly reported experience of feeling different in two languages. Panayiotou (2004) elicited reactions from Greek-English and English-Greek bilinguals to two cultural variations of a short passage about a young man's lifestyle. In Greek, the participants sympathized with the protagonist and expressed concern for his family and his romantic relationship, whereas in English, the same participants disapproved of his actions and called him selfish. Using cultural icons as a prime, Hong, Morris, Chiu and Benet-Martinez (2000) found that bilinguals in Hong Kong exhibited more "Chinese behavior" in response to Chinese cultural icons and more "Western behavior" in response to Western cultural icons. Hong et al argue that bicultural bilinguals possess two cultural systems between which they "frame shift" when stimulated by culture-relevant cues. Studies have attempted to capture this shift with various psychological tests including the Big Five Inventory (BFI) personality test (Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martínez, Potter \& Pennebaker, 2006).

Koven (2007) devised an elaborate three-part research design to examine how bilinguals perform and experience multiple selves in two languages. Twenty-three Portuguese-French bilingual women were asked to recount a series of personal experience twice, once in Portuguese and once in French. The narratives were then triangulated with introspective interviews, discussing language ideologies and their linguistic backgrounds; and peer evaluations, where listeners commented on their impressions of the speakers. While some subjects described intrinsic differences between French and Portuguese, others believed the differences were context-dependent and interaction-related. Experiences were reflected in storytelling styles, which consequently affected the listeners' perceptions. Speakers in French were generally perceived as assertive, hip and urban, whereas the same speakers in Portuguese were perceived to be more reserved and modest. Koven argues that when Portuguese-French bilinguals switch languages, they do not merely switch between linguistic codes, they also switch between socioculturally performable personas that are recognizable to the bilinguals themselves and others.

Together, these studies suggest that bilinguals have multiple values and attributions and can switch between different socioculturally appropriate behaviors. As this phenomenon of feeling different when switching languages is not unique to French-Portuguese bilinguals, using Koven's (2007) framework as a basis, this study examines how a female bilingual from a different population, namely Japanese-English bilinguals, experiences and enacts her identities. More specifically, it compares how she presents herself differently in personal narratives in English and

Japanese; and how she understands the impact of her two languages on her experience of self.

## Methodology

## Data collection

Primary data were collected from a focal participant known as Eri (a pseudonym), a 26-year-old Japanese-English bilingual with approximately equal competence in her two languages at the time of interview. Recruiting a balanced bilingual participant helped ensure that any differences yielded are not only due to a lower proficiency in one language. Data were collected in two parts: A narrative elicitation session was conducted by two interviewers and an in-depth interview was conducted by the researcher. All sessions were audio-recorded with the permission of the participant.

In the narrative elicitation, Eri was asked to describe personal episodes on the same topics in two languages to two separate bilingual interviewers. Two female interviewers who could be considered Eri's plausible peers were recruited and elicited eight narrative topics (for a total of 16 narratives), of which only one will be presented in this paper. Both interviewers matched Eri's gender (female), age (mid-20s), educational level (graduate student) and had spent time living in English-speaking countries. The interviewers were instructed to be as encouraging as possible and to provide moderate backchanneling while limiting comments and questions to a minimum during the sessions.

After the narrative elicitation session, Eri was asked about her general attitudes and thoughts towards being bilingual and her experience of telling the same stories twice. The interview was conducted primarily in English with some code-switching to Japanese.

## Data analysis - Speaker Roles

The narratives were transcribed verbatim and were checked by native English and Japanese speakers. As English and Japanese are typologically different languages and the focus of this study is on identities rather than structural elements, the transcripts were divided into segments based on idea units (Chafe, 1980) rather than syntactic clauses as in Koven (2007). The units were then coded in terms of speaker roles based on Koven's (2007) framework, which outlines three primary speaker roles in bilingual narratives: narrator role, interlocutor role and character role. A speaker assumes the narrator role when he/she describes a series of events in the past without any evaluations (Labov, 1972), and is typically characterized by the use of first-person pronouns and past tense verbs. However, as pointed out by Labov, personal narratives are not usually told entirely from the narrator's perspective and is often interrupted by the interlocutor role, which is when the speaker deviates from the development of the plot and returns to the here-and-now moment with the interlocutor and reveals his or her current interpretation of the event. The character role is observed when the speaker steps into the roles of the characters, including his/her own, and re-performs their speech and thoughts using direct quotations. The total number of roles per language per narrative was calculated to compare narratives of different lengths.

## Findings and Discussion

## Eri's profile

Eri was born in Japan but moved to England when she was eight, where she stayed until she completed her undergraduate degree. Being immersed in an all-English environment, Eri's English quickly improved but at the cost of her Japanese. However, by the time she entered secondary school at the age of thirteen, she had gained more stable control of her languages and was able to switch back and forth between English and Japanese with ease. Eri was enrolled in two afterschool Japanese learning programs and continued with one of them via distance learning until she entered university. Although she had no difficulty using Japanese, she was often told that her Japanese sounded too formal and mature for her age because her only opportunities to practice Japanese were with her parents.

After graduating, Eri spent three years in America before returning to Japan for her master's degree when she was 22 years old. She believes her Japanese level has improved greatly since her return and she now speaks more "like a regular Japanese person" rather than a news broadcaster. In evaluating her own English and Japanese proficiency, Eri thinks her English is
better than Japanese in all aspects except for spoken interaction, where she believes they are of equal proficiency as she has been able to practice Japanese much more often recently. With a better understanding of Eri's language learning experience and biographical background, the next section looks at Eri's actual language use in Japanese and English.

## Part 1: Narrative elicitation

The narrative pair presented in this paper is in response to the prompt $A$ time when you were involved in an accident. The story is a typical example of Eri's narrative style in terms of speaker role proportions. The event originally occurred in Japan when Eri was approximately four or five years old and was first elicited in English then in Japanese. In both the English and Japanese narratives, Eri goes to the supermarket with her grandmother's helper. While the helper is paying the cashier, Eri leaves the supermarket alone and attempts to cross the road. A car hits her causing her to lose consciousness for a moment. Her first thought upon regaining consciousness in both stories is the fear of getting reprimanded by her parents. In the Japanese version, however, the helper scolds Eri, whereas in the English version, the helper and the driver both worry about the fact that Eri's relatives are not present. She later learns that the car fled the scene after it hit her. In both stories, Eri asks her grandmother to keep the accident a secret and Eri's parents only find out about the accident years later when Eri inadvertently mentions it.

The events and characters presented are almost identical in both narratives, yet they were not in any way direct translations of each other. According to the speaker role proportions analysis, both narratives were also similar in many ways: Approximately a third of each story was presented from the narrator's perspective, with $35.6 \%$ in the English version and $37.7 \%$ in the Japanese version. The narrator/interlocutor role was used slightly less, with $30.4 \%$ in English and $25 \%$ in Japanese. There was virtually no use of interlocutor/character role or character/narrator role in either telling. The one significant difference between the stories is the amount of interlocutor role and character role in which Eri engages. In English, she employs the interlocutor role $23 \%$ of the time and the character role $10.4 \%$ of the time. In contrast, in Japanese, these numbers are almost inverted: $26.4 \%$ for character role and $10.4 \%$ for interlocutor role.

With a larger proportion of interlocutor roles in the English narrative, it can be expected that the listener would be more engaged in the story. When communicating her attitude in regards to the actions of the hit-and-run driver in English, Eri paused the narrative and returned to the here-and-now moment as an adult, twenty years from the accident, to express her anger directly to the interviewer. The result of this increased interlocutor role percentage is clearly seen when the English interviewer could not help but ask whether the hit-and-run driver was found after the accident. In comparison, in Japanese, rather than plainly conveying her anger towards the driver as a current feeling, Eri assumed her there-and-then self, the four or five year old, and expressed her annoyance in a sulky voice while laughing through the character role. Eri also interacted with the interviewer throughout the Japanese narrative, but she accomplished this while advancing the plot with the use of Japanese interactional particles such as ne (commonly used to seek acknowledgement or agreement) and yo (often used when providing new information) in a way to keep the listener's attention and build rapport (Maynard, 1993).

While in English Eri often spoke through the interlocutor role, in Japanese she utilized the character role more often. This is most apparent when she asks her grandmother to keep the accident a secret. This section in English was summarized and embedded into the narrative whereas in Japanese, the dialogue between her and her grandmother was enacted vividly through the character role.

Even though the representation of the events are slightly different in the two stories, the referential content are largely the same, apart from when Eri made a joke about her mental health. In English, the joke was made earlier on, after she spoke of her anger towards the hit-and-run driver. On the other hand, the joke in Japanese is made at the very end by her parents in the form of quoted speech performed in a high-pitched voice. This gives the whole story a playful ending and a sense of completeness. Although the English narrative also ends on a light note, with Eri expressing her surprise at the fact that her grandmother had kept the secret, the English narrative is interweaved with Eri's resentment towards hit-and-run accidents, giving the overall story a hint of seriousness.

As a result, two subtly different narratives are produced by placing emphasis on different elements of the narrative in combination with the varying use of speaker role types. To further understand the significance of these differences and how they contribute to Eri's subjective experience of the two languages, the next section presents the findings from Eri's self-perception interview.

## Part 2: Interview

When asked whether she felt different in her two languages, Eri responded with a very distinct "yes". Eri perceives English to be "cold and proud" while Japanese is "cute and cheerful". As a result, when she speaks in Japanese, she feels she naturally becomes more childlike and when she speaks in English, she has been told that she is somewhat direct and cold.

## Imbalanced Language Proficiency

In trying to articulate her different experiences, Eri switched back and forth between various interpretations. Initially, her first intuition was to attribute the difference to her own imbalanced language proficiency. Eri imagined that if the narrative sessions had been conducted when she had first returned to Japan when English was still her dominant language, she would not have been able to articulate herself as well. As a result of her improved Japanese, she was able to "sound like herself" in both versions, implying that she believes that language ability was the only thing preventing her from expressing her "real self". Many BEQ respondents mentioned that the reason they feel different when switching languages is because their weaker language, typically the L2, feels less "natural" (Pavlenko, 2006). Due to the limited opportunities to speak Japanese before moving back to Japan, Eri did not have the linguistic resources to produce what she felt were sufficient expressions of thought. Consequently, she felt that was the reason why people perceived her differently and why she herself felt different. Thus far, it seems that Eri's case supports the results from Pavlenko's (2006) study, which suggested that many bilinguals feel like a different person because of their inability to communicate their "real" self in the weaker L2. In the discussion that would continue, however, it became clear that Eri's sense of difference in fact only became more intense after her Japanese ability improved.

## Cultural Differences

Eri explained that she tends to be more direct when speaking in English compared to Japanese because most of her Native English speaking acquaintances speak in this style. She believes that if she were to speak in the same way in Japanese as she does in English, "Japanese-minded people" would find her impolite and too assertive. Eri observed that Japanese interactions usually involve a large amount of giggling, in particular interactions between females, and other agreement gestures such as head nodding. As a result, when she speaks in Japanese she also laughs more often and constantly looks for verbalized signs of affiliation in the other party. Eri's intuition is in fact supported by Japanese discourse studies, which report that speakers provide verbal backchannels considerably more often than English speakers (Maynard, 1993). In the interview, Eri repeatedly made comments such as "because that is what Japan does" and "this is how it is" to justify her different ways of speaking in English and Japanese. Similar to the bilinguals studied by Chen and Bond (2010), it appears that a large part of how Eri speaks in each language depends on what she perceives to be culturally appropriate. As a consequence of the years she was socialized in Japan, the United States and England, Eri has both acquired linguistic competence in two languages and also developed cultural sensitivity and pragmatic competence.

## Emotional differences

Studies on the autobiographical memories of bilinguals have reported that when the language of occurrence is the same as the language of recall, the narrative is more detailed and emotionally intense, in particular if it is the L1 (Marian \& Kaushanskaya, 2004; Schrauf, 2000). Despite the fact that the events depicted in the story pair occurred in Japanese, Eri's L1, the English version included more emotional expressions and involved less neutral, narrative segments. The two versions, however, did not differ considerably in terms of the amount of details provided. According to the speaker role analysis and the referential content, it appears that Eri's analysis does not support the hypothesis that personal narratives are more vivid when encoded and retrieved in the L1. A possible explanation for the contradictory results could be that since Eri, who has spent most of her life in English-speaking contexts, has experienced her L2 English in a large diversity of emotional contexts (Dewaele, 2013), resulting in stronger emotional conceptions in the L2.

## 'Old self versus 'New self’

Eri's discussion of how and why she thinks she feels different when switching languages revolved around external themes, namely, social and cultural conventions. She also spoke of having two selves: an "old self" versus a "new self". An "old self" linked to England and a "new self" emerging within Japan. Interestingly, although she referred to the possibility of possessing two
selves, she also claimed to feel that she should only have one stable "core self". Her situation is somewhat similar to Kanno's (2003) participants who had a polarized perception of identity that they could only belong to one culture.

It is not surprising that Eri should understand identity in this way as this perspective of self as "stable, coherent, acontextual, and internal" is entrenched in many cultures and societies and still persists in everyday discourse (Koven, 2007, p. 3). Her experience tells her there are multiple versions of her, yet folk belief dictates that she is supposed to have only one united self. Kanno (2003) reported that all four of her informants reconciled the differences between their two languages and cultures approximately a year and a half after returning to their home country. Similarly, while Enloe and Lwein (1987) found that most children resolved adjustment problems within two years of reentry, these time frames clearly do not apply to all bilinguals. At the time of the interview, Eri had already returned to Japan for four years yet was still in the process of coming to terms with the differences between her two languages and cultures.

## Limitations

One limitation of the study is the profile of the interviewers. Second language research and sociolinguistic research have provided evidence that the identity of the researcher impacts the speech of interviewees (Beebe, 1977; Rickford \& McNair-Knox, 1994). Eri reflected on the way she speaks to "very Japanesey" people and "non-Japanese" people and she imagines that she would have spoken slightly differently if the English interviewer had interacted in a more "non-Japanese" manner. Japanese-English bilinguals who have similar linguistic competence in both languages and comparable sociocultural experience with Eri might have been more suitable than the interviewers in this study, who shared only the same age, sex and education levels.

## Conclusion

The narrative analysis of the "same" stories told in two languages has demonstrated that when speakers narrate stories, language is used not only to represent but also to perform and interpret. This can be understood through Bakhtin's (1981) concept of voicing, where languages and styles are associated with different sociocultural values and understanding of identity. Depending on the interlocutor, the context and interactional aims, the speaker can choose to enact various identities. Speakers do not simply convey one real or core linguistic identity but also construct and choose identities for specific interlocutors (Joseph, 2004). Rather than considering different linguistic repertoires as merely alternative ways of expressing the same "inner core", they should be regarded as tools that are used to perform different identity types.

Investigating the identity of bilinguals is by no means a straightforward task. The greatest challenge, as with all identity research, lies in the impracticality of individually analyzing the multiple aspects of identity and self, since it is precisely their synthesis that makes up the "overall identity". The situation is further complicated by the bilinguals' languages, which may be linked to different cultural scripts, emotionality and experience. Similar to a complex system, the bilingual's overall identity can be thought of as constructed through the interaction between multiple facets where they all modify and redefine each other. What would be useful in the future is to develop a more comprehensive framework encompassing the multiple dimensions of language and identity specific to bilinguals.

Using a combination of subjective and objective methods, this study has attempted to offer a glimpse into the dynamic relationship between the self, identity and language of one bilingual individual and offers a better understanding of what it means for bilinguals to "feel different" when switching languages.

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[^0]:    ${ }_{1}$ A bicultural is an individual who has experienced and internalized more than one culture.
    2 A bilingual is defined as someone who uses two languages regularly in his/her daily life.

